



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

PART I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1. Project Title: Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Club Range

2. Type of Proposed Action:

The Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Club (WRPC) range proposes to:

- Extend the 100 yard Rifle Range to 200 yards
- Improve the access road to the 100-yard target backers
- Construct an access road to the 200-yard target backers
- Replace the maintenance and handicapped access gate and install an additional gate
- Install handicap access and safety signs
- Seed and fertilize the areas disturbed by the new construction
- Install permanent footers for the 200-yard backers

3. Location Affected by Proposed Action:

The WRPC range is located approximately 3.5 miles northwest of Hamilton, Montana, 2.5 miles west of Highway 93, at 578 Blodgett View Drive, Hamilton, MT, 59840, Lat. 46.27415, Long. -114.198822; Section 15, Township 6 North, Range 21 West.



Figure 1 – Aerial View of the Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Range, Hamilton, Montana

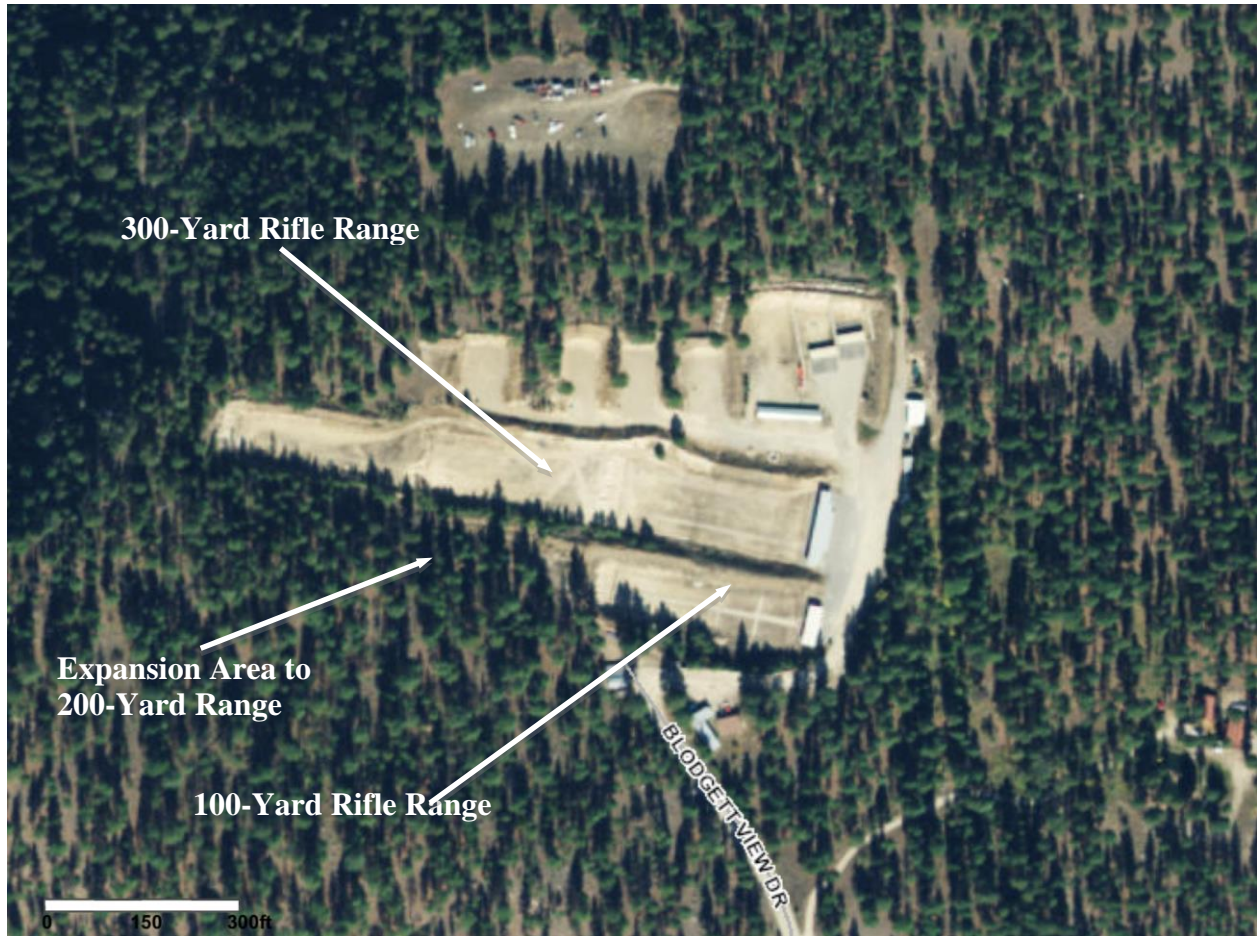


Figure 2. Location of Proposed Projects at the Whittecar Rifle & Pistol Range

4. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: MCA 87-1-276 through 87-1-279 (Legislative established policies and procedures for the establishment and improvement of shooting ranges) and MCA 87-2-105 (Departmental authority to expend funds to provide training in the safe handling and use of firearms and safe hunting practices). The Montana Legislature has authorized funding for the establishment of a Shooting Range Development Program providing financial assistance for the development of shooting ranges. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has responsibility for the administration of the program, including the necessary guidelines and procedures governing applications for funding assistance under the program.

To be eligible for grant assistance, a private shooting club or a private organization:

(a)(i) Shall accept in its membership any person who holds or is eligible to hold a Montana hunting license and who pays club or organization membership fees;

(ii) May not limit the number of members;

(iii) May charge a membership fee not greater than the per-member share of the club's or organization's reasonable cost of provision of services, including establishment, improvement, and maintenance of shooting facilities and other membership services; and

(iv) Shall offer members occasional guest privileges at no cost to the member or invited guest and shall make a reasonable effort to hold a public sight-in day each September, when the general public may use the shooting range for a day-use fee or at no cost; or

(b) Shall admit the general public for a reasonable day-use fee.

5. Need for the Action(s):

The expansion of the WRPC range will relieve shooter conflicts by providing nine additional shooting benches that will allow for 200-yard rifle opportunities. The benches are already in place but shooters are currently restricted to 100 yards on this range. The expansion will also increase the handicap access out to 200 yards. The project will expand and enhance the majority of the current rifle disciplines. The project may also provide the WRPC an opportunity to host an international Big Bone competition in 2020. This project also enhances range opportunities for sight-in season prior to the general big game rifle season. In summary, the project would enhance shooting opportunities and would improve the facilities for range events and tournaments.

6. Objectives for the Action(s):

The objective of the proposed project is to improve long-range shooting opportunities for members, handicap shooters, and visitors by extending the 100-yard rifle range to 200 yards, improve the access road to the 100-yard backers and build an access road to the 200-yard target backers, install permanent target backers, install handicap access and safety signs, install new access gates and maintain existing gates, and re-vegetate disturbed soils.

7. Project Size: estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected:

The proposed project would involve approximately one acre of the WRPC range.

8. Affected Environment (A brief description of the affected area of the proposed project):

The WRPC range is located on 30 acres of state trust land leased from Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The property is not located within a floodplain and there are no permanent surface waters or wetlands on the property. The WRPC range offers shooting opportunities for rifle and pistol.

9. Description of Project:

The proposed project involves improving the access road to the 100-yard backers and constructing a new access road to the 200-yard backers. The area between the 100-yard line and the 200-yard land will be leveled and excess material will be utilized in order to establish a safety berm where required. This work will be completed with an excavator, dump truck and dozer. Volunteers will install: the footers and steel posts at the 200-yard line; the handicapped locking device to the safety arm; the signs; and seed and fertilize disturbed areas. The estimated costs include:

▪ Excavation and Access Road Improvement and Expansion	\$ 20,000
▪ Gates	\$ 276
▪ Safety Signs	\$ 551
▪ Seed and Fertilizer	\$ 537
▪ Steel Footers	\$ 503
▪ Volunteer Labor	<u>\$(10,971)</u>
Total Project Budget	\$ 21,867
Total Funding Requested from FWP	\$ 10,934

10. List any Other Local, State, or Federal Agency that has Overlapping or Additional Jurisdiction:

None

Permits, Licenses and/or Authorizations:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
N/A		

Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$10,934

11. Affiliations, Cooperating Agencies, User Groups and/or Supporting Groups:

The WRPR is located on 30 acres of state trust land leased from Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. This is a private range with an annual membership fee of \$40 for individuals, \$60 for families, and \$30 for law enforcement and seniors, and is open to visitors for a \$5 day-use fee. The WRPR hosts up to 100 events each year and approximately 23 organizations and eight law enforcement agencies use the range each year, including Boy Scouts, Bitterroot Buckaroos, Bitterroot Blasters, Ravalli County Reserves, Ravalli County Sheriff, Montana Highway Patrol, Hamilton Police Department, Stevensville Police Department, Babes with Bullets, FWP Hunter Safety, Teller Wildlife Refuge, Mule Deer Foundation, NIH Rocky Mountain Lab, and Schuetzen.

12. History of the Planning and Scoping Process, and Any Public Involvement:

Because the WRPR is a non-profit, private shooting club for members, there has been no public involvement in the planning process. Proposed range development proposals have been discussed with the club members and the associated project vendors and contractors.

13. List of Agencies Consulted/Contacted During Preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

14. Names, Address, and Phone Number of Project Sponsor:

James McCormack, 1005 College Street, Stevensville, MT 59870. (406) 777-5779.

15. Other Pertinent Information:

The WRPR is a non-profit, private shooting range. The closest shooting range providing similar shooting opportunities for rifle and pistol shooting is in Missoula, Montana, 60 miles from the WRPR. The nearest range providing similar shooting opportunities for shotgun only is in Hamilton, MT.

Shooting range applications require the participating governing body to approve by resolution its submission of applications for shooting range-funding assistance. Resolution Date: January 31, 2017.

PART II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A, the **Proposed Alternative**, and **Alternative B**, the **No Action Alternative**, were considered.

Alternative A (Proposed Alternative) is as described in Part I, paragraph 9 (Description of Project): to extend the 100-yard rifle range to 200 yards; improve the access road to the 100-yard backers and build an access road to the 200-yard target backers; install permanent target backers; install handicap access and safety signs; install new access gates and maintain existing gates; and re-vegetate disturbed soils. There are beneficial consequences to acceptance of the **Proposed Alternative**.

Alternative B (No Action Alternative) Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shooting Range Development Grant money would be denied and the area will remain as an active shooting range without the proposed improvements. The no action alternative would have no significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences. The range will continue on with present conditions. Land use would remain the same.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how

the alternatives would be implemented: Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There were no other alternatives that were deemed reasonably available, nor prudent. Neither the proposed alternative nor the no action alternative would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

Describe any Alternatives considered and eliminated from Detailed Study:

None. Only the proposed alternative and the no action alternative were considered. There was no other alternative that were deemed reasonably available, or prudent. Neither the **Proposed Alternative** nor the **No Action Alternative** would have significant negative environmental or potentially negative consequences.

List and explain proposed mitigating measures (stipulations): None

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Abbreviated Checklist – The degree and intensity determines extent of Environmental Review. An abbreviated checklist may be used for those projects that are not complex, controversial, or are not in environmentally sensitive areas.

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		2
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		4
5. Water quality, quantity & distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		5
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		7
8. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		8
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		9
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics				X		11

2. & 5. There are no delineated wetlands and no natural water sources within the area proposed for development. No critical wildlife habitat would be affected. Any resident or transient wildlife may temporarily leave the area during construction.

4. The elimination of vegetation for the implementation of the proposed project will not change the overall abundance and diversity of plant species within the area. The proposed project occupies a small portion of the property. Due to prior land use, native vegetation has been disturbed in the area of the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project will have a minor impact on native vegetation in the area.

7. The proposed project will cause limited displacement of soils but the developments will not substantially effect geological features or establish new erosion patterns. Soil disruption for this site is localized. Erosion control measures will be in effect and disturbed area will be reseeded.

8. Minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions would be created by construction equipment during construction. However, the construction time is short and human effects will be limited due to the sparse population near the property.

9. This project uses no federal funds nor does it take place on state owned or controlled property; therefore, the Federal 106 Regulations and the State Antiques Act do not apply.

11. The property is already used as a shooting range so the proposed project will have no additional impact on the aesthetics of the property.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Below
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		4
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities				X		7
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution & density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

4. The site borders privately-owned forest lands on three sides and Montana State Trust Lands on the remaining side. The site is not suitable for agricultural production.

7. The proposed developments will increase shooting opportunities within the community.

PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

All of the pertinent or potential impacts of the project have been reviewed, discussed, and analyzed. None of the projects reviewed were complex, controversial, or located in an environmentally sensitive area. The projects being implemented are already on an existing range or altered areas that together with the insignificant environmental effects of the proposed action, indicates that this should be considered the final version of the environmental assessment. There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative.

The Whittecar Rifle and Pistol Club Proposed Alternative, to provide a safe, regulated shooting opportunity, is supported by its members and the public. Therefore, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should approve the Proposed Alternative (A) for the improvements as outlined in Part I, Paragraph 9.

PART V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? No

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? Individually, the proposed actions have minor impacts. However, it was determined that there are no significant or potentially significant cumulatively impacts. Cumulative impacts have been assessed considering any incremental impact of the proposed action when they are combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and no significant impacts or substantially controversial issues were found. There are no extreme hazards created with this project and there are no conflicts with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan.

Recommendation and justification concerning preparation of EIS:

There are no significant environmental or economic impacts associated with the proposed alternative; therefore, an EIS is not required.

PART VI. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

Individuals or groups contributing to, or commenting on, this EA:

- James McCormack, 1005 College Street, Stevensville, MT 59870. (406) 777-5779.
- MT Fish Wildlife and Parks

EA prepared by:

Andrea Darling, Darling Natural Resource Consulting, Montana City, MT 59634

Date Completed:

June 20, 2017

Describe public involvement, if any:

This draft EA will be advertised on FWP's web site and through a legal ad in the ***Ravalli Republic, Hamilton, MT*** announcing a public comment period. A press release will also announce the project and comment period.